

John 6:60-71

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Date: 25 February 2018

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[0 : 00] So we pray that we would glorify your name. Amen. That is so offensive. How dare you?

I cannot believe that you said that. I wonder how many things you've heard along those lines this week. Whether you've heard those in your office, in your place of work, in the street, in the news, on social media.

We live in a culture that's preoccupied with offense. Who causes it? Who takes it? How to get rid of it? To say that something is offensive has become a surefire way to have it publicly rejected.

Now, I work with the Christian unions in Glasgow, and recently some of the universities in the UK have required Christian unions to fill in emotional risk assessment forms to make sure that the event that is going to be put on doesn't cause emotional harm and damage to people coming to hear it.

If a speaker is going to cause offense, then they can be no-platformed, which means that they can't even speak at a public event. Taking offense has become the new method of disagreement.

[1 : 12] Whether something is true or not seems to come second. So what do we do when we come across something that offends us? What do we do when we're told that yet another one of our favorite foods is now going to cause some sort of major health problem?

Or more seriously, what do we do when one of our favorite politicians is shown to have publicly lied about facts and figures? What do we do when a political decision is made that we don't like?

Do we get angry? Do we campaign against it? Do we petition against it? What do we do when faced with a truth I don't like? How I react shows me a lot about what I really value.

So how do I react when I find that what the Bible has to say is offensive to me? What do I do when the Bible disagrees with what I hold dear, with my values and my standards?

What if when I read what Jesus has to say, I find it completely offensive? Well, this passage that Yung Zayn read for us is at the end of a section of John that speaks right into our lives at that moment.

[2 : 24] When Jesus' words offend me, how do I respond? I'm going to look at this in two sections, very simply. How is Jesus causing offense?

And how do the people around him respond? So I wonder if Jesus was around today, how popular he would be on social media. It's kind of hard to imagine him being as popular as maybe Phil and Holly from this morning.

He's probably not going to reach those levels of, you know, public sanctification. Maybe he would be as divisive as Theresa May or Jeremy Corbyn. But I think, given how Jesus is treated by the people around him at this time, I think in our day he'd be deeply unpopular.

Much less popular than any of the other people I've mentioned. I think he'd be the subject of almost constant outrage on social media for the things that he said. He probably wouldn't be a figure that actually we would want to socially connect ourselves with for fear of public opinion.

Jesus' words have always been and will always be offensive in every age and in every culture. So my first point then, how does Jesus cause offense in this passage?

[3 : 41] His grumbling followers describe his teaching as hard. And Jesus said it himself in verse 61. Does this offend you? Jesus knows what he has been saying has really got some people's blood boiling.

But why? Well, we're at the end of two long chapters of John's Gospel. We won't understand why these people are reacting this way until we understand what is causing the offense.

So as we've looked over these two chapters, we've seen Jesus heal a paralyzed man, walk on water, feed 5,000 people, and even more, with a couple of loaves and fish.

And yet these people still seem completely unable to really understand who Jesus is. On top of that, he's been teaching things that just aren't comfortable for his listeners.

If we're ever tempted to make Jesus out to be entirely gentle and inoffensive, then, well, this passage shows us we've made a mistake. So why are the people struggling with his teaching?

[4 : 45] I think there's a few reasons over the last couple of chapters. I think for most of the people that are listening, there will be a kind of mix of these things. First is that people loved it when Jesus was doing miracles, when he was feeding them all in a big crowd, and when he was providing for them.

But actually, Jesus is showing that's not his priority. He's not here to provide for people's temporary comfort, but actually to preach about eternal life.

Jesus just isn't going to be the person these people want him to be. Secondly, Jesus offends all the Jewish sensibilities by claiming to be superior to Moses, and an equal authority of God himself, and to most Jewish ears, that is just blasphemy.

Third, Jesus says that people must eat his flesh and drink his blood. And, you know, it's a fairly gruesome metaphor if you've ever come across one.

People are unwilling to listen, though. The initial knee-jerk reaction to that metaphor means they don't look past it to hear what he's actually saying. And finally, and probably in many ways, the most offensive thing that Jesus has come out with in the last few chapters is to say that people's own religious effort counts for absolutely nothing in God's eyes.

[6 : 03] No one can come to God unless they are enabled. People can't build their own tower to heaven, and all good deeds count for nothing. The Jewish religious system these people have followed faithfully isn't actually taking them any closer to God.

So notice where Jesus is standing. In the verse just before the one we had read, he is in a synagogue. He's offending every possible Jewish sensibility.

Is he just doing it to be provocative? Well, no. Jesus is actually showing great love to these people by speaking the truth plainly and clearly to them.

And no wonder they get offended because these are the last things they want to hear. Notice how Jesus nails down his teaching in this section. The spirit gives life, and the flesh counts for nothing.

And then to say, no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them. Those certainly were offensive words for Jesus' hearers at that time, but I wonder how you hear them yourself.

[7 : 15] Is this actually easy for us to hear? I think one of the intriguing things about this passage is that the people who are offended by Jesus' words here are described as his disciples.

It's not crowds full of people who don't have any time for Jesus getting offended by something he's said, but people who've already started to follow that are not happy with what he's saying.

I think the implication John is making for those reading his gospel is that it's not just outside rejection that Jesus faced, but one from people who claim to follow him.

For those of us who count ourselves as Christians, we need to ask, does Jesus offend me too? If you're honest, how comfortable are you with the idea that Jesus' priority is preaching and not providing?

Do we like that he calls his followers to care more that people receive eternal life after this one than making their life comfortable now? Actually, that might start to really get to me.

[8 : 21] Are we comfortable with the idea that our own good deeds, our own religious effort, and our own good living have nothing to do with our place in God's kingdom? That being a good person has never gotten a single person into heaven?

Ultimately, that means I don't have final say in my salvation. My own choice to follow Jesus isn't what matters most to God. In fact, if God hadn't made me able to respond, I wouldn't have done.

Does Jesus offend you? Well, he certainly offends me. It gets right to my core and really challenges how I feel and think about my life. These words aren't easy to hear.

It strips me of my autonomy and my pride and my independence that actually I really want to constantly live out. But if Jesus is right, I'm actually utterly dependent on him for absolutely everything.

So are Jesus' words offensive? Well, yeah. Absolutely they are. The good news is actually quite hard to hear.

[9 : 26] I think we find ourselves at our most British when we think about the way we respond to things that offend us.

We might be having the most heated debate we've ever had in our whole lives, but at a very casual level of noise. We have those awkward silences, the passive-aggressive hospitality, the cup of tea with no smile.

Even the dreaded, well, let's just agree to disagree through a forced smile, the ultimate effort to gloss over an offense.

How we respond to disagreement says a lot about what we think about the person we're disagreeing with. So the second point I want to make then is how do people respond to the offense that Jesus causes?

Well, first we see rejection, and it's very stark. Verse 66 says, from this time, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

[10 : 28] But we also see in verse 64, Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. This isn't a neutral objection for the offended people rejecting Jesus' message after claiming to be his followers and then rejecting.

This is a betrayal, says John. And it's also not surprising Jesus. It's not catching him off guard. At this point, we might want ourselves trying to tell Jesus to just calm down and get a better evangelistic strategy because this is really putting people off.

But in that, actually, I find in my own heart my motivations are showing up. I value comfort more than truth. Jesus has been preaching a message that isn't palatable.

It's offensive in every age and culture and history. And the sting at the end of this passage is that Jesus knows who's going to betray. Even Judas, whose betrayal isn't coming for a whole year from this point.

The truth is that what Jesus teaches is never popular. It wasn't then, and it isn't now, and it won't be tomorrow. I think the fact that Jesus is with the twelve only a short while after feeding thousands and thousands of people points to just how many have rejected him.

[11 : 56] Imagine how hard it must have been to see all those people turn away. He was preaching to thousands and now there is twelve and even one of them is going to betray him. Many who counted themselves as his followers didn't stick around for the long haul.

So for those of us here who would call ourselves Christians, how do we react when Jesus disagrees with us? How do we respond to his authority? Does it frustrate us or does it humble us?

When you come across something in the Bible that goes against your values or calls into question the way you live, when it shines a light onto the darker parts of your life and proves that you need to change, how do you react?

Do we ever find ourselves wanting to reject Jesus' words and authority? Because we can't pull the wool over his eyes, can we? He knows what we really think about him.

He knows who will reject him in the end. This passage might lead us to ask some serious questions of our own motives. Am I a Christian because of what it gets me?

[13 : 07] Because of the community, the experience, the childcare, even because of how well I serve the church and how much I enjoy being seen as that person who does that thing? Or is it because I intend to humbly honor Christ?

Pastures like this aren't comfortable and they shouldn't be. They should be a real challenge to our own hearts and motives. As hard as that can be to hear though, at the end of this chapter, after most people have awkwardly shuffled out of the room and left Jesus with the twelve, we get this sharp question.

You do not want to leave me too, do you? And a question, what are these twelve men's motives for staying? Peter, unsurprisingly, jumps right in with an answer, as always.

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God. In the midst of rejection, we find that some do humbly accept Jesus' teaching and will continue to be his disciples.

These words from Peter show us the right response to Jesus' teaching, even when it's hard to accept. Jesus has been claiming to offer eternal life and how he has the authority to give it, even referencing his home in heaven in verse 62.

[14 : 37] The words he has spoken to these will give life. To reject those words would be to reject the source of eternal life and only Jesus has those words and that authority.

And this, Peter and the twelve have understood. Here are some whom the Father has enabled to come to Jesus. And the proof of this is that they have stuck around.

And they will stick around and persevere to the very end with Jesus. Now John is very clear on the purpose of his gospel.

He tells us at the end he has written these things that people might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing have life in his name. And here, at the end of this hard teaching is proof that some do listen, they do understand, and they will receive eternal life.

The remaining disciples have recognized that Jesus is the Son of God. And if they were to reject him, well they would have nowhere else to go. They know they can't do it alone.

[15 : 45] Either they will have eternal life with humility or nothing at all. And actually in that they see this offer is true and real. this offer of eternal life is one that they can accept.

Jesus' final reply to Peter though weeds out any hint of self-promotion of the disciples, any pride that they actually have stuck around. They are reminded that Jesus chose them.

That even with that, one of them would still betray. this must have also been hard to hear. In many ways, it's the last offensive thing that Jesus says to them, that even the ones who stayed, one will betray.

And yet, that's how this section ends. All this teaching ends in many rejecting, but a chosen few responding to Jesus. They didn't do it themselves, they can only respond to Jesus in humility, but in doing so, they have eternal life.

So here's where we end the series in John, looking at Jesus, the bread of life, the one who turns all of our assumptions about what it means to follow God on their heads and calls us to follow him.

[16 : 54] So first, I want to say, if you're here and you're not already a Christian tonight, you might just be investigating who Jesus is. Don't worry if you find Jesus' words hard to hear and the Bible hard to reconcile with your daily life.

What we find here is that Jesus offends the self-sufficient individual in every one of us. So don't let your initial reactions towards hard passages like this put you off investigating further.

If Jesus really is who he says he is, then you're being offered eternal life and you can't get that from anyone else. For those of us here who would bear the name Christian, however, when Jesus says something you don't want to hear, how do you react?

Do you turn away and do your own thing as so many have before? Do you find that you're more likely to argue with Jesus' words than to accept them? You might have some significant questions to ask.

It must be clear that we can't fool him into thinking that we are something that we are not. Even if we fool everyone in church, if Jesus' priorities are not ours, the challenge is whose priorities are going to win out in the end?

[18 : 11] How are we going to treat his word and his church? Have I humbly accepted the word or rejected it as inconvenient and hard? Or, have you found in Jesus that however hard you find what he says, you're still willing to trust?

Actually, the fact that this is at the start of the gospel that ends in his death for you means that you will still follow. You are still willing to obey when actually that puts you completely at odds with the surrounding culture.

That enduring faith in Jesus, the determination that he will be Lord in my life even when I find it hard to follow is a sign of being enabled to come to him.

This passage isn't here to worry is of have I been enabled? Actually, if you are responding to Jesus in faith, you have been enabled to come to him. The gift of eternal life is freely given by the Father through the Son he loves.

I can't do anything to earn it myself. Is this teaching hard? Yes, but the blessing is so much greater than any hardship I may endure because of it. And what I joy it is to know that we are offered real eternal life even in words that we find hard to hear.

[19 : 34] So finally, let us pray and we'll use some of Peter's words as we pray. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God. Father, would you give us an ability to echo Peter's words in our own heart, that we would come in humble acceptance of our complete inability to save ourselves, but great joy that you offer yourself to us in Christ, and that you have brought us to eternal life.

Give us the grace to change when we find your words hard, wisdom to accept them, to put them into practice, and to worship you with our whole lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.